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Environment as a Factor in the English Novel, 1850-1914

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Environment as a Factor
in the English Novel,
1850-1914

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By
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PREFACE

The title of this thesis might lead one to the misconception that it is a historical survey of a type of novel. That is not true. In the first place the novels considered here do not constitute a type; they are of many types. The demonstration of that fact is a minor purpose of this thesis. In the second place a genuine historical survey would be a foolish project, for two reasons: the task would be too large in that the influences acting between novelists would individually provide subjects of investigation which in aggregation would be very unwieldy; and since such a project would include most of the major novelists of the period, it would amount to little less than a history of the novel of the period. In the third place this thesis is not exhaustive of novelists or novels; it is not intended to be. Instead it is selective and illustrative.

It is not a historical survey; it is an analysis. It ultimately arrives at a principle for evaluating the fictional worth of different attacks that have been made on the problem of handling environment as a factor in the novel. Its chief defect is that, since it is not an exhaustive treatment of the novelists and novels of the period, it may seem to leave unaccountable gaps, and the relationships of its parts may not always be obvious, but since its reasoning

is inductive, its unfolding must be gradual and its organization cannot be justified until its parts have been drawn together in the final analysis of Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER I

Heredity versus Environment

The influence of environment on the development of character has been of particular consideration by English novelists for about the last one hundred years. Before the middle of the nineteenth century it was of little interest to most novelists. Even so recent a figure as Dickens provides an example of a novelist whose concern with the environment in which his characters lived seldom went beyond the portrayal of a setting harmonious to the characters, but not affecting them. I do not imply that among the novels of Dickens and his predecessors there was no instance of reactions between characters and their environments; but when there were such instances they were not typical of contemporary fiction, and they were not of primary importance in the works in which they occurred. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, however, there has been an emphatic stress in English (and other) fiction on the force of environment in the molding of character.

This stress has taken two forms, one of which was old, and one of which was new; one of which was broad in its interpretation, and one of which was narrow and specialized. These two interpretations of the place of environment in life are not restricted to fiction but are also discernible in or-

dinary academic consideration of the problem.

The former and older of these two points of view is that in which environment is considered merely as one of the two major molding forces of character: heredity and environment. From this point of view the environmental influence is a single unit of force, is not complex, is not primarily psychological, is generally antithetical to that of heredity, and is most often applicable only to the general constitution of the character rather than to individual tendencies, appetites, impulses, and actions, psychical or physical.

The second and newer of the two points of view toward the influence of environment on character is that in which environment is considered not merely as a corollary of heredity nor merely as the general conditions under which a character lives, but rather as the sum total of the stimuli, either external or internal, that determine the character's action. From this point of view even hereditary influences can ultimately be included in the technical term "environment". This interpretation of the factor of environment is, with differences dependent on the stages of its evolution, what is today known as behaviorism.

In fiction the consideration of environment as a general factor is of long standing, but the behavioristic interpretation is, with a few isolated exceptions, definitely modern.

The relatively simple theme of heredity and environment as forces in the growth of character without minute psychological analysis is a theme that has been used with varying emphasis almost throughout the history of fiction. In modified forms it was a minor theme in even some classical literature; the divine ancestry of Aeneas is not a negligible factor in the Aeneid. But in these instances in the literature of the Ancients and in similar ones that could be cited in medieval literature, the theme is admittedly of no more importance to the whole than a single bee is to the hive. These instances are relevant merely in that they demonstrate the contrasting generality of the theme when it is separated from psychological analysis.

In modern literature, however, there is a type of work, found generally in isolation from any so-called school, that exemplifies the next higher stage of this theme. It is still lacking in psychological analysis, but the theme has been elevated in importance. It consists in those novels which have as their principal theme the conflict between the forces of heredity and environment, but which develop that theme in general terms rather than in the terms of an advanced psychology. It should be noted that this classification excludes both those novelists who used this theme as a minor one and those who, in some degree, exemplified the modern psychology that has descended academically from

Spencer and fictionally from Zola. It is an "orphan" category, manifested only sporadically, without national limitations and without traceable trends or inter-influences. It is pertinent only in that it contrasts with the rest of this study in its demonstration of the uses of this environmental theme as a principal theme, but without a specialized psychological method. An outstanding peculiarity of the novels in this class is that there is almost invariably a definite conflict between the hereditary influence and the environmental; this is not, on the other hand, the prevalent situation in most of the other novels to be considered later. This classification, then, is not one which is concerned only with environment as a factor in the novel; it is rather concerned with heredity ¹ versus environment.

Without pretense at giving exhaustive consideration to this type of novel, one can, by selected examples, observe the insular nature of the type. It has neither nationality nor definite historical period, although, of course, it has had more frequent manifestation in the last seventy-five years. The following examples are all from that period. Most of them argue for the superiority of heredity over en-

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1. I know of no individual work on this type of novel, but an elementary bibliographical introduction to the field can be found under the heading "Heredity" in: Ernest A. Baker and James Packman: A Guide to the Best Fiction (London, Routledge, 1932).

vironment. As illustrative of the internationalism of this type of theme, they are drawn from German, Scandinavian, English, and American literature.

In German, Clara Viebig's Einer Mütter Sohn² has a theme which, if it were fact rather than fiction, would resemble very closely a controlled psychological experiment on this problem. It is the story of a peasant woman's son; he is adopted by a lady in Berlin who believes that education (environment) is stronger than heredity. Ultimately the subject of the experiment dies of heart disease, but not until the novelist has made her point that heredity cannot be overcome by environment.

Erik Hellstrom in his novel Snörmakar Lekholm Får en Ide³ has developed this same theme, but on a larger scale. It is different from many novels of this type in that it does not take a biographical form, but has rather many characters as subjects instead of one. It treats of the large Lekholm family through two or three generations. In the family there are seen characters of all varieties of quality and condition, from the bad to the good and from the failure to the success. One would suppose that such a vari-

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2. Clara Viebig: Einer Mütter Sohn (Berlin, 1906), tr. by H. Rashauge as The Son of His Mother (New York, Lane, 1913).
 3. Erik Gustaf Hellstrom: Snörmakar Lekholm Får en Ide (1927), tr. by F. H. Lyon as Lacemaker Lekholm Has an Idea (New York, Allen and Unwin, 1930).

ety of characters within a family must have been the result of differing environments, but Hellstrom, with satisfactory realism, attributes the contrasts to a combination of different strains in the family. He too believes in the power of heredity.

In England the one novel of Sir Walter Besant that deals with this theme exhibits some slight variations from the general type. It again is not biographical in form, but, more in the manner of Einer Mütter Sohn, it is intended to illustrate a problem of heredity. I refer to The Children of Gibeon.⁴ This novel of Sir Walter Besant's is in conformity with the author's sociological interests and does not confine itself entirely to its principal theme of heredity versus environment, but includes much propagandic material concerning poverty, social changes, and the distinctions between classes. Its main theme, however, is concerned with the lives of two girls, one the daughter of a nobleman and the other the daughter of a poor washer-woman, who are placed in the same environment. Besant does incidentally show some effects of heredity, but he ultimately gives the verdict to environment.

Although in the three novelists who have been used so

4. Sir Walter Besant: The Children of Gibeon (New York, Harper's, 1886).

far as illustrations of this type of novel the treatment of environment has been in a spirit of realism, yet in the fourth and American example, that of Oliver Wendell Holmes, there is, in his most illustrative novel, Elsie Venner, only a veneer of realism laid over a fundamentally imaginative conception. Two others of Holmes' novels contain similar considerations of hereditary tendencies, but do not have such a wierd inception as this one. It is the story of a girl whose mother was bitten by a rattle-snake at the time of the girl's birth. This incident is supposed to be the cause of Elsie's serpentine character. Like the son in Einer Mütter Sohn, Elsie dies young, probably because an impossible character had to be disposed of. There is some real analysis of Elsie, but the fantastic basis of the story nullifies any pretensions that it might make at being a genuine psychological study.

These four novels are illustrative of the type whose principal theme is that of heredity versus environment, but which does not make use of elaborate psychological analysis. Each of the four novels is in some degree interesting; the authors had command of the mechanics of fiction-writing.

5. Oliver Wendell Holmes: Elsie Venner (Boston, Houghton, 1867).

6. The Guardian Angel (Boston, Houghton, 1867) and A Mortal Antipathy (Boston, Houghton, 1885).

Yet no one of them rises above the mediocrity of merely being interesting.

I believe that it can be taken as axiomatic that no novel can rise above the level of its theme. By this I do not mean to imply that all worthy novels must be novels of purpose; even purely humorous novels and mystery novels, which are certainly not novels of purpose, must depend to a considerable extent upon their themes. Nor do I mean to imply that the theme is the only important factor in determining a novel's value; very many other factors are also important: strong characterization, suspense, some degree of realism, good dialogue, psychological insight, and many others. Yet if, hypothetically, a novelist were a master in handling all of these other factors, his novel would be only as powerful as its theme.

Some themes dealing with environment may have value; others may not. They may or may not be of value when they illustrate merely a psychological process; that depends on whether or not the psychological process is of any significance.⁷ They may be of value if they exemplify a particular problem that is at least somewhat widespread in its applications or manifestations.⁸

7. J. D. Beresford is the chief expositor of this type of theme. Cf. below, Ch. VII.

8. Henry James' What Mazie Knew is an excellent example of this. Cf. below, pp. 55-58.

But novels whose theme is only that of heredity versus environment do not have any inherent significance. It does not matter that one novelist believes that heredity is superior to environment or that another believes the opposite. It does not even matter if the idea is developed very effectively and powerfully, for the original thematic weakness devitalizes the novel.

In Snörmakar Lekholm Får en Idé, it is the characterization that makes the novel interesting. In Einer Mütter Sohn and The Children of Gibeon it is the sociological problem that gives the novels what worth they have. And in Elsie Venner it is the medical speculation that is of interest. But in each case it is this worthless type of theme that manifests itself as an inherent weakness.

CHAPTER II

Definitions of Meaning and Period

When the "orphan" category of novels whose principal theme is that of heredity versus environment has been disposed of, there still remain several varieties of novels in which environment is a factor.

If these novels are called in the aggregate novels of environment, it must be remembered that they do not constitute a clearly distinguishable type. Quite naturally, however, many of them do belong to one or another of the legitimate classifications of novels that have been erected. Most of them are realistic novels; some are naturalistic; a few are novels of purpose; several are genealogical novels; many are social novels; and still others do not fit well into any of these "type" categories. But whether or not they are susceptible to this kind of classification is irrelevant to this analysis.

What is highly pertinent, however, is that these novels of environment can be shown to be of certain kinds, each of which exhibits certain common characteristics. These distinctions between the various kinds of novels of environment can be made the basis of new classifications or "types" which it is expedient to observe in this analysis.

The main division to be made is between those novels in

which environment is used as a theme and those in which it enters only as a method of characterization or of achieving psychological realism.

For facility in discussion I shall call these respectively novels of environmental theme and psychological novels. These titles are not accurate descriptions; particularly is the latter one inaccurate. By psychological novels I mean not novels which lay all emphasis on mental action rather than physical action, but rather all those novels, of whatever type they may be, which lay emphasis upon the influence of environment on character. In this connection the two points of view toward environment that were discussed previously⁹ must be considered again; it must be remembered that the word environment can have the ordinary meaning in which it refers simply to the character's surroundings, particularly in as far as they affect him, and that it can have the behavioristic meaning in which it refers to the aggregate of the forces (stimuli) affecting the character. This term, psychological novels, includes a large percentage of all the novels that have been written in the last seventy-five years; I use the term merely to indicate the distinction between it and the other term: novels of environmental theme.

9. Cf. above, pp. 5-6.

Novels of environmental theme can be divided into three classes, of which the first and simplest is the one that has already been discussed in Chapter I, that in which the novels have as their main themes simply a conflict of heredity and environment.

The second class of novels of environmental theme are those whose themes are concerned with a problem that pertains not only to environment, but also to society, manners, morals, or some other phase of thought or conduct. The novels of this class are not always clearly distinguishable from psychological novels.

The third class of novels of environmental theme is that which consists of novels whose main themes are illustrations of a kind of psychology, particularly behaviorism. The principal examples of this class are the novels of J. D. Beresford.

These divisions are more clearly seen in outline form:

10. This one type of novel, because it is found in isolation rather than in a movement of influences, was susceptible to unified treatment in a single chapter. The other types will be considered concomitantly in a chronological order, mainly in Chapters VI and VII.

11. The underscored terms which are used in this outline, which have been used in the previous parts of this chapter, and which will be used throughout this thesis, should serve to focus attention constantly on the fact that they have been artificially constructed and are intelligible not so much in the light of the ordinary meaning of the individual words as in the light of the discussion made in this chapter.

Novels of environment:

I. Novels of environmental theme:

- A. Novels whose main themes are simply heredity versus environment.
- B. Novels whose main themes, although concerned fundamentally with environment, yet pertain also to a problem of society, of morals, vel ceterorum.
- C. Novels whose main themes are illustrations of a kind of psychology (particularly behaviorism).

II. Psychological novels: novels in which environment, either in the ordinary or in the behavioristic meaning of the word, is used as a method of attaining realism of psychological treatment rather than as a basic theme.

In addition to these definitions of meaning, some definition of time can be made for novels of environment. I have been speaking of the middle of the nineteenth century as marking the appearance of this type of novel. Like most literary periods, this one must be set somewhat arbitrarily: 1850 is approximately correct for its beginning, for it was approximately at that time that the scientific movement rose to the point of prominence at which it left its own fields and began to pervade other fields of thought and activity, including that of fiction-writing.

It was Madeleine Cazamian in her dissertation Le Roman
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et les Idées en Angleterre who made the pioneer discus-

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12. Madeleine Cazamian: Le Roman et les Idées en Angleterre (London, Milford, 1923).

sion of this phenomenon. In her work, however, there is consideration not only of the new psychological doctrines, but also of the new thought in other fields, notably sociology. She has set the beginning date of the period at 1860, but admits that the date is not absolute:

Il est toujours délicat de délimiter une période, puisqu'il n'y a pas de commencement ni d'achèvement absolu dans la réalité. Les théories de Darwin et de Spencer ont été formulées et répandues. Parmi les romanciers, une génération s'éteignait—celle de Dickens, Thackeray, Kingsley, les soeurs Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell. Ceux qui leur succédèrent se montrèrent animés d'un esprit nouveau, que j'ai tenté de définir. (13)

As she has pointed out, neither the beginning nor the end of the period is an absolute point in real time. Her discussion ends with the year 1890. In that she was defining un esprit nouveau such a concluding date is justifiable, but actually l'esprit which she called nouveau is still, with some limitations, l'esprit. It has merely become somewhat less preoccupied with itself and consequently more pliable. The real essence of the "new spirit" was an emphasis on the intellect and reality rather than on the imagination and fantasy. That same emphasis still prevails. Merely for convenience and because of reluctance to deal with the not-too-clear present, I have set 1914 as the end-date of this discussion. Furthermore, the fact that this discus-

13. Op. cit., p.vii.

sion is predominantly analytical rather than historical makes an exact chronological definition of the period unnecessary.

CHAPTER III

Backgrounds in Science and Fiction

The two men in the scientific movement of the Mid-Nineteenth Century who most definitely instigated the phenomena that are observable in the subsequent fiction, were Darwin and Spencer.¹⁴ Of the two it was Spencer whose influence was the more direct and intensive, if not extensive.

Darwin's influence was, for the most part, indirect. His work influenced other scientists, philosophers, thinkers; and it was his satellites who popularized his ideas, gave them additional applications, and ultimately affected even so remote a field as that of fiction. Included among them was, of course, Spencer. Darwin's ideas had some direct influences upon fiction, too. Most obvious of these was the development of the genealogical novel; its very essence is almost always dependent upon Darwin's doctrines concerning the transmission of characteristics and concerning variations. Darwin's most powerful influence, nevertheless, was indirect, but extensive, in that he pointed the way toward a mechanistic point of view in many fields, and notably in the field of psychology.

This mechanistic point of view, partially owing to Dar-

14. Madeleine Cazamian gives a discussion of the relations of these two men to English fiction: cf. op. cit., pp. 13-19.

win's influence and partially original, is manifest in Spencer's work. The most important of his works in its application to the present problem is his Principles of Psychology.¹⁵ The way in which the Principles of Psychology is based upon the principle of evolution is shown as clearly as quotation will permit, in the following passage; it is a transitional passage.

We will next pass to Objective Psychology; of which three divisions may conveniently be made. In the first, or General Synthesis, we will trace throughout the animal kingdom, the progress in these perpetual adjustments of special inner actions to special outer actions, which accompanies increasing evolution of the nervous system—omitting so far as may be, the element of consciousness. In the second, or Special Synthesis, we will consider this same progress more closely, with a view of delineating and formulating it in terms that imply consciousness. And in the third, or Physical Synthesis, an endeavour will be made to show how, by an ultimate principle of nervous action, this progress is explicable as part of Evolution in general. (16)

But it is the mechanistic quality of Spencer's psychology that is most important in its effects on fiction. His psychology ultimately reduces all human action to the result of nervous stimulation, excluding all spiritual factors, including will.⁽¹⁷⁾ His summary of his conclusions is indicative of this:

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15. Herbert Spencer: Principles of Psychology, 3rd Edition, 2 vols. (New York, Appleton, 1910).
 16. Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 142.
 17. Op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 495-504.

It was pointed out . . . that the a priori law of intelligence would be fulfilled, and the growth of intelligence would be explained, if it could be shown "that when a wave of molecular transformation passes through a nervous structure, there is wrought in the structure a modification such that, other things equal, a subsequent like wave passes through this structure with greater facility than its predecessor." It was thereafter inferred from established mechanical principles, that a structural change of this kind will occur. And we have since occupied ourselves in tracing up nervous evolution as an accumulated result of such changes. (18)

And not only is intellectual growth a mechanical process, but so also is all mental development and, inferentially, all human action:

A not unsatisfactory fulfilment of the anticipation with which we set out has, I think, been reached. In the General Synthesis mental development, traced up from its beginnings, was represented as a correspondence between inner and outer actions, that extends in Space and in Time, while it increases in Speciality, in Generality, and in Complexity. The Special Synthesis carried further this interpretation of mental development, by showing how the advancing correspondence, when translated into the more familiar terms of Reflex Action, Instinct, Memory, Reason, Feeling, and Will, is comprehensible as a continuous process naturally caused. And in the Physical Synthesis just concluded, this continuous process naturally caused has been interpreted as a cumulative result of physical actions that conform to known physical principles. (19)

Mental development, then, according to Spencer, is characterized by a correspondence between inner and outer actions. It is this correspondence that became emphasized in fiction. The actions of characters had to be made more

18. Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 577.

19. Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 614.

mechanical—more directly the result of stimuli, motives, environment.

Many parts of Spencer's philosophical system have, of course, been popularly discredited by subsequent thinkers, but surprisingly little of his psychological principles has been denied by those who have followed him. There is still, quite naturally, the fundamental disagreement which was begun by Darwin, between those who hold the traditional, orthodox view of the history of the world and those who explain it mechanistically. And in the field of psychology the similar disagreement prevails on the subject of whether the intellect and will of man are spiritual faculties or can be explained as purely physical properties. However certain the orthodox believers may be that they are right, they cannot deny that the Spencerian type of psychology is a reality as a theory—a theory that is widely held. And most will admit that large parts of the mechanistic psychology are valid and capable of being reconciled with any traditional views that the individual may hold. But the validity of the Spencerian psychology is not pertinent to this discussion; only its existence is relevant. And it cannot be denied that it is a popular theory which has had many and profound influences extending into even so remote a field as that of fiction.

As I indicated above, there have been some changes

made upon Spencer's theories in the subsequent mechanistic psychology. In as far as I have described Spencer's theories, however, I have mentioned nothing that is not compatible with the most widely used mechanistic psychology today, namely, behaviorism. The principal difference is that Spencer laid emphasis upon the broader phases of psychology, particularly upon the rather general process of the growth of intelligence, while behaviorism, which has always been linked closely with educational theory, lays emphasis rather upon the process involved in the individual act of the mind: in other words, upon the importance of certain appetites, stimuli, etc. in causing definite somewhat predictable reactions. It is in this stage that modern psychology has had its most appreciable effect upon fiction. It has caused novelists to become definitely aware of the realistic value of proper motivation of character. Action has become dependent not upon the imaginative whim of the novelist, but rather upon his psychological insight. In a sense this growth of the science of psychology has effected in the field of fiction the change from imaginative and romantic novels to what we now term realistic novels--novels that lay emphasis on realism in human action.

Yet the scientific background of this change is not the only one to be considered. The preoccupation of Eng-

lish novelists of the last half of the nineteenth century with the problem of environment as a physiological and more importantly as a psychological factor in the molding of character, can be traced not only to the academic thinking of such men as Darwin and Spencer, but also to the fictional movements that were going on across the Channel. In France Flaubert and Zola were developing and popularizing a realism and a naturalism that had profound repercussions in the English novel. It is not completely true that the scientific fiction of France was a source of the comparable fiction of England, for some English novelists ante-date the French naturalists in the employment of a scientific treatment; Charles Reade, for example, had published three of his novels ²⁰ before Madame Bovary ²¹ made its appearance. Yet it is true that the French movement was more intense and developed to a state of maturity before the comparable English movement.

It is not Flaubert so much as Zola who goes deeply into problems of environment, but flaubert is nevertheless important for his pioneering triumph in modern scientific realism. His realism would probably never have been so intense were it not for the fact that it was a conscious re-

20. Peg Woffington (1853), Christie Johnstone (1853), and It Is Never Too Late to Mend (1856).

21. Published in 1857.

action against the romanticism and sentimentality of his earlier works. When Madame Bovary appeared in 1857, it was the first masterpiece of modern realism. The following comment on Madame Bovary by Carl Van Doren indicates what a complete reaction it represented:

Denying himself all the lyricism and egotism of his previous writings, Flaubert worked for five years to make his novel scientific and impersonal, to base it altogether upon facts which should be so clearly presented that they would make any commentary needless. . . .

In imaginative literature there is, of course, no such thing as a purely impersonal, scientific attitude. Behind the most powerful will to have that attitude lies the desire which causes a writer to want to be impersonal and scientific. . . . He (Flaubert) desired reality with a passion as intense as that he had felt for unreality. . . .

It was the fierce impulse behind Flaubert's detachment which gave his book its special quality among realistic novels. Other realists have had an eager affection for a great variety of details and have had joy in fitting them into their stories. But for no other realist in no other novel have actual or typical facts been so completely the sole end. Flaubert made every effort to exclude doctrine, purpose, partisanship. (22)

Perhaps some of Van Doren's claims are slightly extravagant, but at least they do indicate that Flaubert's method goes toward the scientific ultimate at least as far as the first requirement, that of being objective. But Van Doren's remarks also imply another characteristic of Flaubert's work that is very valuable as a contrast to the

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22. Carl Van Doren: "Introduction" in Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary (in the Guild Classics, n.d.), pp. ii-iii.

work of Zola. The quoted passage says that "for no other realist . . . have typical facts been so completely the sole end." In this respect Flaubert contrasts with Zola, since for Zola incidents need not be typical.

Zola's Rougon Macquart series of novels is, of course, the great manifestation of French naturalism. It is a series of twenty "experimental novels" in which there is traced with scientific accuracy the physiological and psychological history of a family in whose blood there was a hereditary taint.

Each book illustrates a certain phase of social life; and the work is carried out with unparalleled energy and an exhaustive research usually confined to specialists. Unprepossessing features are the commonness of the subjects, the domination of a mechanical view of life, the absence of spirituality, taste, or even selection. The avowed principle of the "experimental novel", as Zola denominates this form of fiction, is to place beings, whose physical and mental constitution is known, in a certain environment and under the influence of certain events, and then to see whether the result corresponds with the author's observation of life. Hence this family chronicle must be regarded as a serious study in human evolution, each novel showing the influence of heredity and the disturbing effect of variation, each important character exhibiting in his conduct and career the tendency of his blood. (24)

Zola's novels were the extremes of naturalism. They attempted to show merely a cross-section of life and to

23. Cf. Madeleine Cazamian's treatment of naturalism, op. cit., pp. 74-91.

24. Baker and Packman: op. cit., p. 516.

display characters as they were affected by their environments. They succeeded in doing that, but with a resulting loss of artistic form and aesthetic power. The social problems with which they deal give them the only vigor that they have, for, as far as the characters and their relations to their environments are concerned, the complete lack of some kind of principle of selection tends to devitalize them. Flaubert, in Madame Bovary, for instance, sought constantly and successfully for typical incidents that would portray his characters; Zola did not do this. And Daudet in his Sapho, as a second example from French naturalism, had a powerful theme to guide him in the selection of the incidents (the environment) into which his characters should be thrown. It is the complete lack of any principle of selection, perhaps synonymous with a lack of taste, that makes Zola's novels unprepossessing. In this respect Zola is a forerunner of such a modern novelist as J. D. Beresford.

But both the realism of Flaubert and the naturalism of Zola manifest an emphasis upon environment that was new in fiction. And it is this new emphasis, particularly in the mechanistic form which it took under the guidance of Zola, that displays itself in the works of the English novelists such as Reade at the beginning of our period and Beresford at the end, and that distinguishes their novels

from the essentially unrealistic and rather romantic novels
of such men as Dickens and Scott.

CHAPTER IV

Pre-Nineteenth Century Manifestations

There is always a tendency in tracing a movement such as this one, to simplify it too much. It would be an instance of over-simplification to presume that the phenomena which are being observed in English fiction were entirely the result of the origins to which they have been thus far attributed and that therefore there was no manifestation of this scientific view of the world, of man, and of psychology prior to the appearance of such men as Darwin and Spencer or Zola and Flaubert. Actually there were substantial indications of this scientific view previously. It is true that these instances were incidental and did not constitute a part of the pervading philosophy of the men who manifested them; yet they existed and as such should be noted.²⁵

If, therefore, I quote such an instance from Tom Jones I certainly do not imply that Fielding's general philosophy or his attitude toward psychology in fiction was generally mechanistic; judged by the realistic standards of today, it was far from that. I mean merely to

25. I mention in this chapter only two examples of this phenomenon. Additional examples are indicated and briefly discussed in Madeleine Cazamian: op. cit., pp. 33-39. She does not, however, mention the two examples which are discussed in this chapter.

indicate that anyone of intelligence, such as Henry Fielding, even though he was writing approximately a century before²⁶ the scientific movement in thought arose, might easily stumble upon the expression of a mechanistic point of view without in the least doing his general mode of thought any violence. In referring to a particular incident in his Tom Jones Fielding says:

Though this incident will probably appear of little consequence to many of our readers, yet, trifling as it was, it had so violent an effect on poor Jones, that we thought it our duty to relate it. In reality, there are many little circumstances too often omitted by injudicious historians, from which events of the utmost importance arise. The world may indeed be considered as a vast machine, in which the great wheels are originally set in motion by those which are very minute, and almost imperceptible to any but the strongest eyes. (27)

It is true, of course, that Fielding here applies this mechanistic principle principally to the development of a plot, but there is certainly nothing inexplicit about his general statement that "the world may indeed be considered as a vast machine". Although a modern author would undoubtedly have been less straightforward in his expression of the idea, yet the idea itself is almost identical with the theme of such a modern novel as J. D. Beresford's Jacob Stahl. The difference is that with Beres-

26. Tom Jones was written in 1749.

27. Henry Fielding: The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (New York, Mason, 1931), p. 168.

ford the idea is paramount, while with Fielding it is probably even less than tantamount in importance to the many other ideas that are displayed in Tom Jones. It is the richness of thought in Tom Jones that makes it a novel superior to such a one as Jacob Stahl in which the very singleness of emphasis upon a purely mechanistic interpretation of life gives the reader an impression of intellectual sterility.

Another example of the same idea as that quoted from Tom Jones can be noted in William Godwin's novel Caleb Williams. In that story, when Mr. Falkland's steward, Mr. Collins, then an old man, meets Caleb Williams, the persecuted hero whom Mr. Collins believes a criminal, he says to Caleb:

" . . . You know my habits of thinking. I regard you as vicious, but I do not consider the vicious as proper objects of indignation and scorn. I consider you as a machine; you are not constituted, I am afraid, to be greatly useful to your fellow-men, but you did not make yourself; you are what circumstances irresistibly compelled you to be. . . . I would gladly assist you if I knew how in detecting and extirpating the errors that have misled you." (28)

This is not only another example of a mechanistic point of view, but a more extreme example. Godwin, as a product of the intellectualism of his time, succeeded, in such pas-

28. William Godwin: Adventures of Caleb Williams (New York, Scribner's, 1795), p. 375.

sages as the one quoted, in removing all spirituality from his interpretation of man. He does not, of course, use the terminology which was to be erected in the following century, but that makes the idea no less clear; for he says in effect that his hero is the product of his environment. Godwin did not have to know the meaning of the term "behaviorist" in order to yearn to be one. He showed himself a prophet of the mode of thought that has now produced an H. G. Wells and a J. D. Beresford.

Neither Tom Jones nor Caleb Williams is, of course, a novel of environment, for neither of them lays emphasis upon the factor of environment. Yet the passages quoted from these novels manifest how it was possible even before the modern scientific movement for novelists to express a mechanistic view of human behavior.

CHAPTER V

The Gap of Romanticism

The two antithetical terms romanticism and realism require clarification in the light of the history of English fiction in order that their meaning may be reconciled with the attitude toward environment that was caused by the scientific movement. We consider ordinarily that realism deals with actualities while romanticism deals with the products of the imagination. Yet all fiction is imaginative; the distinction is reliable only if realism be defined as having as its purpose the creating of the illusion of actuality.

Even with this definition of realism, however, further distinction of meaning is necessary. For the realism of Fielding, for example, has little in common with the realism of the nineteenth-century Charles Reade or the twentieth-century H. G. Wells. If the problem be simplified as much as possible, the difference may be determined as that between a factual realism and a psychological realism.

The early English novelists were concerned very little with psychological realism; if the mental and physical maneuvers of their characters were within the confines of possibility, that was enough. But these novel-

ists were concerned with a kind of realism that laid stress upon settings, customs, and other minutiae of human life. Defoe particularly relied upon this kind of realism; the circumstantial details which he wove into that narration of Robinson Crusoe, for instance, lend to that improbable tale its tone of reality. (One might also call attention to the use of a rather unusual and primitive environment in Robinson Crusoe—an incidental treatment of environment that has no direct relation to the rest of this study.) But Defoe was not the only factual realist among the early novelists. Richardson's Pamela, for instance, despite the sentimentality and near-absurdity of its theme and many of its situations, and despite the domination of its moral purpose, does, in many of its incidents, display a kind of domestic realism. In Fielding's Tom Jones there is a tendency, not throughout, but merely occasionally, to give much detail about setting; in Tom's journey from Exeter to London, for example, there seems to be a definite attempt to give factual information about the route of travel. And in Smollett's Humphrey Clinker Matthew Bramble's letters are full of informational paragraphs about the places visited, particularly Bath; the narration of the embarrassing incident in the rolling bathhouse is an example.

But it is true that in Richardson's work sentimental-

ity almost obscured this early kind of realism and in Sterne's work it certainly did. This was a foreshadowing of the romanticism that intervened between the early factual realism of Defoe and the later realism that laid greater stress on psychological analysis.

This romanticism of the last part of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth had as one of its main attributes the stressing of the imaginative, whether in poetry or prose. But in fiction this emphasis naturally tended to be a negation of realism both of the early factual kind and of the yet-to-come psychological. In the more extreme cases it tended toward the exotic, toward something wholly different from what the novel had been or what it is today. One of the forms which it took was that of the Oriental novel, of which the two most conspicuous examples were Samuel Johnson's Rasselas and William Beckford's Vathek. Both of these, but particularly the latter, were highly imaginative and therefore unrealistic. But probably the most extravagantly imaginative vogue was that of the Gothic novel, a form that was indulged in by Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Mrs. Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis. The most extreme example of this type was Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto which did not even feign credibility.

All of these Oriental and Gothic novels were of the

last half of the eighteenth century and definitely constituted the fictional vogue of their time. They were, furthermore, so completely imaginative and romantic that no extended discussion of them is needed; but the fiction of the first part of the nineteenth century was not so much of one cloth—nor of so violently colored material. For the new century was one of reason as well as imagination. The political import of the French Revolution, the philosophical ideas of Rousseau on the infinite perfectibility of man, and the social aspects of the mechanization of industry were opening new fields to novelists. Yet the romanticism which was just reaching its heights in poetry and which had spent itself fictionally in the excesses of the Gothic, was still present in fiction in a more subdued and rational tone. Two figures, I think, stand out: Scott and Dickens.

The heroic and historical elements in the novels of Scott, as well as the imaginative elements that had their roots in his apprenticeship as a poet, characterize his novels as definitely romantic. Yet they most certainly do not share in the improbability of the Gothic novels; they are, at least, credible. But it is also true that while they are credible they are not realistic in anything more than setting and other superficial details. The motivation of their plots and characters is almost entirely

based upon types; essentially the novels are heroic, not realistic.

When I said that two figures, I thought, stood out as typical of romanticism in a growing trend of intellectualism and then named those two figures as Scott and Dickens, I was quite aware of the disparity between the two novelists and also of the fact that Dickens possesses a certain invulnerability to classification.

It is true that Dickens deals with themes that are not historical, but contemporary, not imaginative, but real. Certainly prison reform and Poor Laws (treated in Oliver Twist and Little Dorrit), industrial conditions (treated in Hard Times), and the inadequacies of legal processes (treated in Bleak House) are not romantic themes. And yet, despite the reality of his themes, Dickens was not a realist in his depiction of crime,²⁹ for instance, or, more importantly, in his portrayal of human psychology. Oliver Twist, for example, must have had an innate goodness quite unexplainable to behaviorists or he would inevitably have become a product of his criminal environment. And Sidney Carton, if he were really a product of

29. For a full discussion of this aspect of Dickens' work cf. Walter C. Phillips: Dickens, Reade, and Collins, Sensation Novelists (New York, Columbia, 1919).

his environment and only a mechanical creature who could be expected to follow his strongest inclination, would probably have preferred a few hours more in an ale-house to his ride by the side of the seamstress. As far as the effect of environment on characters is concerned, Dickens is not a realist whether the term "environment" be considered in a broad sense or in the behaviorist meaning. His novels are not psychological novels. He is a figure of negative importance to this study. He illustrates the fact that powerful fiction is possible if the characters' actions are given merely an element of probability and even if they are not treated with scientific realism.

Thackeray, writing even later than Dickens and surrounded by the scientific and pseudo-scientific thought of the times, was also immune to the methods of the new realists. He made his characters seem real by avoiding improbabilities, but he was certainly not a psychological novelist.

CHAPTER VI

1850-1914

The scientific movement, like other movements of its kind, is not susceptible to definite chronological limitations, and, if I have been referring to it as a phenomenon of the latter part of the nineteenth century, certainly I have had no intention of giving 1850 as the absolute date of its beginning. In some senses one might even go to the Renaissance for its origin. Certainly such men as Locke and Newton at the end of the seventeenth century should not be ignored. And, more importantly, the intellectual movement at the end of the eighteenth century should be considered. In France Voltaire and Rousseau and their followers and the revolution with which they were associated, were all manifestations of a movement in economic, political, and philosophical thought that is intertwined with the later developments. And in England William Godwin, whose novel Caleb Williams has been mentioned as an illustration of an early mechanistic interpretation of life, was the outstanding figure in this movement which was to have as its next great impetus the work of Darwin and Spencer: two figures who mark the culmination of this scientific movement. It is because of them that 1850 is determined as the approxi-

mate date of the beginning of this new-found scientific interest on the part of the novelists in the factor of environment.

In English fiction of the time, however, there is a diversity of treatment of this factor. Although Dickens, whose works continue into this period, treats environment as having an almost negligible effect on his characters, yet Charles Reade, as a contemporary and as one who has many features of similarity to Dickens, gives to environment an important part in his novels. Reade tried to be a naturalist, but had much less success than the French novelists whom he used as models. His attempts at scientific accuracy often produced inartistic results. In his It Is Never Too Late to Mend, published in 1856, the treatment of environment is significant because it well exemplifies a particular stage in the development of psychological method. The environment is treated rather crudely, but at least it plays an important part. The work in its larger aspects is an example of excessive melodrama. In it, therefore, it would seem unlikely that any study of environment would be found. But actually the novel has in it a study of prison methods that is a veritable purple patch. Reade, of course, claimed absolute realism as the basis of his writing, but he made the artistic error of

using incidents which were purported to be actual but, which seem impossible, rather than fictional incidents which would seem probable. It was this practice that forced most of his work into the mould of unbelievable melodrama. In It Is Never Too Late to Mend the only part that is credible is the section which has its setting in the prison.³⁰ In this part of the novel not only are the incidents believable, but the author's claim to documentary realism is convincing. He even goes so far as to present charts of different views of the conduct of the prisoners.³¹ While this presentation is not artistic, it is scientific realism. The section is obviously merely a propagandizing attempt at eradicating prison evils, but it is significant in that it juxtaposes two different prison methods and observes their effects upon prisoners. As a means of exemplifying a social purpose, then, Reade's study of the environment of prisoners is satisfactory, but it should be noted that this study of environment is the theme merely of this part of the work and is not a method of treating an individual important character. It is not, therefore, a contribution to fictional methods. Reade, like Dickens,

30. Charles Reade: It Is Never Too Late to Mend (Boston, Dana Estes, n. d.) bk.i, pp.128-148.

31. Op. cit., bk.i, pp. 189-90, 402.

wrote principally novels of social purpose, and, like Zola, tried to make them scientifically accurate. The combination of the material of the one master and the method of the other should have been felicitous, but Reade pushed the method to extremes. His method of "recording improbabilities" violated Aristotle's injunction that probable impossibilities should be preferred to improbable possibilities and thereby strained the credulity of his readers. It was an instance in which naturalism was ultimately forced to such excesses that it finally ceased to be realism.

In the novels of George Eliot there is the first really successful and artistic treatment of environment as a psychological factor. To understand this treatment one must first understand her attitude toward the novel. It must be restated first of all that George Eliot was primarily a moralist and secondarily an artist. Her divergence from Christianity caused her whole system of

32. Reade's one novel that is definitely not a social novel, The Cloister and the Hearth (1861), stands out as probably the best of all his works. It is a historical novel of a romantic nature showing the influence of Scott. As such it is not pertinent to this study. In this respect it is similar to George Eliot's Romola.

33. Cf. E. S. Haldane: George Eliot and Her Times (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1927); J. L. May: George Eliot: A Study (London, 1930); Sir Leslie Stephen: George Eliot (New York, Macmillan, 1913); and especially Madeleine Cazamian: op. cit., pp. 92-171.

ethics to be based upon human values and therefore, in as far as it was concerned with psychology, upon human psychology. It was quite logical, therefore, that she was the author of psychological novels.

She was not, however, a scientific realist like Reade, nor a behaviorist like the French naturalists, nor an objective psychologist like Henry James. She was rather one who travelled a middle course—one who, in the future, when scientific realism will have been proved difficult to reconcile with the artistic scope of the novel and when objective psychological treatment will have definitely superseded the subjective treatment such as she made use of, will take a place in the history of English fiction as a chief figure of a stage in the evolution of the novel.

George Eliot was definitely not a scientific realist. Her novels are realistic, but not because of any scientific method such as was used by Reade and by the French naturalists. Fundamentally she could not have been that kind of realist because her interest in morals was definitely idealistic; actually, she succeeded in striking a medium in which she was able to depict characters and incidents with an idealism only slightly removed from reality—so slightly that there was left the impression of realism. Of this aspect of her novel-writing she wrote:

To lay down in the shape of practical moral rules courses of conduct only to be made real by the rarest states of motive and disposition, tends not to elevate, but to degrade the general standard, by turning that rare attainment from an object of admiration into an impossible prescription, against which the average nature first rebels and then flings out ridicule. It is for art to present images of a lovelier order than the actual, gently winning the affections, and so determining the taste. (34)

However detached her ethical system may have been from any absolute foundations, nevertheless it appears from the passage just quoted that George Eliot had a profound respect for her ethical responsibility as an artist. It is also apparent that she based her artistic principles on her own conception of how best to convey her own ethical beliefs to her readers. Her endeavor to portray modes of conduct not in ideal states, nor in a strictly realistic manner, but rather as only slightly above the real, is unique as a fictional method.

Quite obviously if George Eliot was not even a scientific realist like Reade, she was certainly not a naturalist. Yet the French critic Brunetière observes her work in his Le Roman Naturaliste:

Faire voir là-dessus que, si les romans de MM. de Goncourt et Zola sont des romans naturalistes, ni ceux de George Eliot et de Charles Dickens, ni

34. George Eliot: "Authorship" in Miscellaneous Essays (New York, Doubleday Page, 1901), p. 233.

Eugénie Grandet, ni César Birotteau n'en méritent, alors le nom, ce qui serait fausser non seulement le sens des mots, mais la vérité même de l'histoire; —telle est l'intention que je m'étais proposée dans ces études. (35)

To understand completely Brunetière's attitude toward George Eliot one must extract several different passages from Le Roman Naturaliste and when one has done this one observes that he makes distinctions in his use of the term naturaliste. He does not use it merely to describe the narrowly naturalistic attitude of such a novelist as Zola; he uses it also more loosely in a secondary sense in which it differs very little from what is known commonly as realistic. With this in mind one can understand how, while he does not label George Eliot as strictly a naturalist, he is yettable to compare her very favorably with the French naturalistic school.

Even if George Eliot was not a naturalist, even if she was not scientific in her employment of realism, she was nevertheless a psychologist of importance. Her treatment of the psychological developments of her characters was probably more extended than any previous English novelist's; in some instances even the forward movement of her stories stopped so that she might elaborate upon the

35. Ferdinand Brunetière: Le Roman Naturaliste (Paris, Michel Levy Frères, 1896), p. iii.

psychological significance of the action. But it is precisely in that respect that her novels represent not so much the beginning of the genre which we now call the psychological novel as rather a step in the evolution that has produced that genre. For the psychological novel subsequent to George Eliot was largely concerned with the presentation of the character and his thought solely through action: objectively. An early example, if not the first, of an English novelist who tried to present character only through action, is Henry James. In his novels one can divine the effect of environment on character by observing action. But in the novels of George Eliot the art was not so highly developed; her art was still the inferior one in as far as exposition of an idea is inferior to dramatization of it.

Inasmuch as George Eliot is the first major novelist to be considered in this chapter, it is necessary to consider, both for immediate gratification and for purposes that will assume greater clarity in the light of Chapter VIII, not only her treatment of environment, but also the relative importance of that factor in her novels. I do not believe that her treatment of environment is a major element in the greatness of her novels. Rather the power that they possess is derived primarily from the excellence of the

themes and other elements in them. The theme of each of the novels is concerned with the development of a character. But the psychological development is not traced for its own sake, as in the behavioristic novels of J. D. Beresford; with George Eliot there is always a large moral significance that lends to her novels a thematic power.

And I believe that a second element in the greatness of her novels is their rigid pseudo-classical construction. Each of them is a study of the conflict of forces between the principal character and a weakness within himself or between him and his environment. The first of these two types of conflict is definitely the motif of the classical drama, which, when transplanted into the novel, retains its vigor and its beauty of form.

Prominent, then, among the elements that combine to make George Eliot's novels great, are power of theme and beauty of form. It is true, of course, that these two factors of excellence could be nullified by poor characterization, poor dialogue, poor psychological development, or other deficiencies. But in George Eliot's novels none of these deficiencies exist. Yet the psychological development is not perfectly executed; it is, for instance, inferior artistically to that of Henry James' novels. It would therefore be a logical conclusion to say that if a novel is to have greatness the element of psychology in it

must be satisfactorily developed, but not necessarily, faultlessly; in other words, the psychological development of the novel (the treatment of environment in the behavioristic sense) is not a supremely important factor in its quality.

Although George Meredith was writing novels almost simultaneously with George Eliot, he was in no sense as much interested in environment as she. An early novel, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, and a late novel, The Egoist, provide satisfactory examples.

It is apparent from the following passage from The Ordeal of Richard Feverel that Meredith considered himself as one of the brotherhood of contemporary novelists in their reaction against the extravagances of the Gothic novels and Terror novels and as one who was bringing a scientifically realistic attitude into play in the production of novels:

Now surely there will come an age when the presentation of science at war with Fortune and the Fates, will be deemed the true epic of modern life. . . . At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh of ours per-

petually changes. And they will perceive, moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of that small one. (36)

But even though Meredith avows himself as a believer in a psychological science that has a bearing on human relations, it is not the purely mechanistic procedure of the behaviorist. For he speaks of the science as being "at war with Fortune and the Fates." He manifests this attitude not only in self-avowed theory, but also in practice. In The Ordeal of Richard Feverel there is a rather elaborate study of Richard's environment and its psychological effect on him, but it is not entirely explainable in mechanistic terms.

And the same is true of The Egoist. Again there is a rather elaborate study of the psychology of an individual, Sir Willoughby Patterne, and the psychological relationships between him and the other characters. But again the "science" of the study would seem very vague to a behaviorist. Even when it appears that Meredith is being scientific, the appearances are deceptive. For instance: the title of Chapter I of The Egoist is "A Minor Incident Showing an

36. George Meredith: The Ordeal of Richard Feverel (New York, Scribner's, 1930), p. 189.

Hereditary Aptitude in the Use of the Knife". "Hereditary aptitude" certainly sounds like a scientific term, but in Meredith's hand it has only the meaning that any layman would give it. Although Meredith does not emphasize psychology in his novels as much as George Eliot, yet the two novelists are alike in their rejection of a purely mechanistic psychology; both of them are artists, not scientific psychologists.

In the novels of Thomas Hardy there are both an emphasis on environment as a general influence and a psychological interpretation that are noteworthy. One of his early novels, The Return of the Native, is a very good illustration of the former, and his last novel, Jude, the Obscure, is a satisfactory illustration of the latter.

In The Return of the Native Egdon heath is a powerful environment. It is the background with which all the characters either harmonize or clash. Eustacia Vye, who is antagonistic to the heath, is eventually destroyed by it, while Clym, the native whose nature is compatible with his environment, thrives on it. Hardy says of him:

He walked along toward home without attending to the paths. If anyone knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance,

37. George Meredith: The Egoist (New York, Scribner's, 1926), p. 6.

38. Cf. Madeleine Cazamian: op.cit., pp. 372-449.

and with its odors. He might be said to be its product. His eyes first opened thereon; with its appearances all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been colored by it; his toys had been the flint knives and arrow-heads which he found there, wondering why stones should grow to such odd shapes; his flowers the purple bells and yellow furze; his animal kingdom, the snakes and croppers; his society, its human hauntings, (39)

This is a use of environment different from any that has been observed previously. It is not merely a setting; it is far more than that. It is not a number of circumstances that constitute a single force; it is in itself a single phenomenon. Thus there is not here an unimportant use of environment, as in the mass of novels outside the scope of this study, and yet this use of environment is not in line with the trend toward a scientific treatment of environment. The only sense in which it is in accord with the scientific movement is as an illustration of adaptation to environment. Actually, though, Hardy's main purpose was to develop fictionally his philosophy of human helplessness in the face of an unknown and generally malevolent destiny. In that philosophy lies the explanation of his use of environment. In the development of the story Egdon Heath, in its relation of Eustacia at least, is a real manifestation of an abstract influence. The very long and full

39. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native, ch. ii, bk. iii.

description which Hardy devotes to the heath at the beginning of the novel testifies to the importance which he placed upon it as a factor in the narrative.

In Jude, the Obscure there is again a conflict between character and environment, but in this novel the environment is more complex. Jude, in attempting to raise himself into a higher intellectual sphere, is crushed primarily by Hardy's unkind Fate, but secondarily by weaknesses within himself. Jude says: "My two Arch Enemies you know—my weakness for women and my impulse to strong liquor." ⁴⁰ That statement is a synthesis of the psychological structure of the novel. It is a contest between high aspirations and low appetites. The outcome is tragedy.

Jude, the Obscure is, I think, a novel that is significant, beyond revealing its author's philosophy, in its manifestation of many trends in fiction. First, its structure, in as far as it traces the conquest of a passion over a character, is that of classical tragedy. Secondly, although Hardy was definitely not as behavioristic as the French naturalists, yet Arabella's seduction of Jude shows their influence in its crudity. And thirdly, the morbid murder of his half-sisters and himself by Jude's son is an

40. Thomas Hardy: Jude, the Obscure (New York, Harper's, 1923), p. 420.

incident reminiscent of the sensational novels of the early part of the century.

Whatever else one may say about Hardy's use of environment, one must say that it was not an end in itself as it is in the novels of a behaviorist such as J. D. Beresford. Hardy used environment as an element in the expression of his philosophy—a philosophy that was in itself powerful and that gave to his novels a large part of the force that they have.

There is an interesting analogy between the methods of Hardy and those of George Eliot. Both of them were, in a good sense of the word, propagandists. George Eliot was trying to improve the morality of the world through her novels; and Hardy, through his, was trying to give material form to his belief in fatalism. To accomplish her purpose, George Eliot formulated her principle of showing courses of conduct not in an ideal state, but in a state only slightly above their actual condition; to accomplish his purpose, Hardy made environment a part of the material manifestation of the "malevolent destiny" which he believed ruled men's lives. Thus both of them molded at least a part of their artistic principles on the necessity which arose from their philosophies and thus the uses to which they put the factor of environment were based on rational principles which rose also from that same necessity.

Although it is a commonplace to say that art was the primary interest which Henry James had in his fictional work, yet that statement is indispensable to any deductive analysis of his work. James sought to make of the novel a product of art, and since form is always an adjunct of art, he laid emphasis on form. Furthermore, inasmuch as form is dependent on meaning, the form of James' novels, and therefore his art, became dependent on his meaning. And since the meaning of his novels was in the last analysis moral, his art was ultimately based on his sense of moral values. These moral values were not so obvious in his earlier novels; in Daisy Miller, for example, the moral element is little more than superficial. But in later novels, such as What Mazie Knew, the themes are definitely concerned with morals. In this respect Henry James is similar to George Eliot; physical reality is for him much less important than moral reality. His moral sense provided him with the unifying force on which his novels were constructed. And upon this fundamental of a unified structure was built the rest of his theory.

As a corollary to this unity of structure James almost invariably centered the interest of the novel in one character.⁴¹ This does not mean, however, that he allowed his

41. The Turn of the Screw, an exceptional story in other respects as well, is an exception to this statement; there is not in it any clearly defined central character.

novels to become fictionally biographical, like J. D. Beresford's Jacob Stahl or H. G. Wells' The New Machiavelli. On the contrary, in accordance with a pre-conceived theme and with the discrimination of an artist, he chose for the material of each of his novels only the part of the life of the character that would most effectively express the theme. And the amount of action necessary to express the theme determined the length of the story; that accounts for the great variations in the length of the stories which James wrote. That was another manifestation of his emphasis on the artistic aspect of the novel.

Although the portrayal of a single important character at a critical point in his life was certainly not a new method when James used it, it was and is a sound method and one that is productive of unity of impression. Unlike George Eliot, he told his stories objectively; but he turned his inability to give direct interpretation of the action from a disadvantage to an advantage. The objective presentation first of all obviated any retarding of the progress of the action, and secondly, by James' method of presenting the action from the point of view of a single character, it became another powerful force in giving a unified impression. In a sense he "filtered" the action through the "consciousness" of one of the characters, sometimes an important char-

acter and sometimes not; in this manner he originated a method that some of his successors have developed into the stream-of-consciousness novel. In The Portrait of a Lady, for instance, he portrays different kinds of culture and different men through the effect that they make on his central character; in What Mazie Knew he shows through the mind of the child the influences on the child of her parents' divorce and love affairs; and in The Turn of the Screw he expresses his supernatural theme not through the consciousness of the two children who are the main characters and whose beings he uses as a kind of tabula rasa on which to depict the action, but rather through the consciousness of the governess who thus provides in this wierd story the unity of treatment that would otherwise have been exceedingly difficult.

These are examples of what Henry James made of the environmental, the psychological factor; he made of it a force for formal unity. Necessarily such an indirect treatment, one in which the author can explain his characters only through his characters, required exceptional psychological realism. To this end James made careful consideration of motives, and there is inherent in his novels an inexplicit kind of behaviorism. But it is definitely not a behaviorism that dominates the action and becomes an end

in itself; rather it is a tool that James uses expertly to accomplish his own artistic purposes. That is the real value of Henry James' method. He apportions to each factor its proper relative position in accordance with his technique, and that involves an employment of the factor of environment, of psychology, only as a method of securing realism and of achieving a unity of impression—not as an end in itself.

The best work in which to study George Gissing's treatment of environment is The Nether World. It is a story of the lower classes in London and derives its interest from the efforts of the two main characters, Jane Snowdon and Sidney Kirkwood, to better the living conditions of their neighbors and friends; their efforts are generally unsuccessful. In this narrative Gissing attempts to give his interpretation of the general environment of the lower classes and its influence on them, and he portrays their environment as one that is fatalistically resistant to improvement.

But Gissing's treatment of the psychology of environment is, at least in parts, very specific. There are, first of all, many "turns" in his plot that depend entirely upon the reticence of individual characters (such as Jane) to make their opinions known to other characters,

and upon the inherently and typically malevolent attitudes of others of the characters.

42

In one chapter entitled "Pathological" Gissing gives the minute psychological processes of the character Clara Hewett in her gradual determination to revolt, to sever her ties with her family, and to improve her position in the world by any means she might find necessary, even by accepting the assistance of "the infamous Scawthorne". Now it is true that Gissing takes her heredity into consideration:

With such parents, every probability told against her patient acceptance of a lot which allowed her faculties no scope. (43)

But he goes on to say:

. . . And ~~as~~ the circumstances of her childhood were such as added a peculiar bitterness to the trials waiting upon her maturity. (44)

And then, after he has given the history of the girl's parents and of her own childhood, Gissing proceeds to construct step by step the psychological processes that eventually led to her decision. Under the stimuli of the reeking bar-room of whose environment she wishes to rid herself, of the prospects of success as an actress,

42. George Gissing: The Nether World (New York, Dutton, n.d.), pp. 78-88.

43. Op. cit., p. 79.

44. Ibid.

and of general resentment against all of her previous life, she mechanically determines to put herself under the patronage of Saawthorne.

Although this chapter is not really typical of Gissing, yet it illustrates the fact that, in parts at least, he was capable of delineating a mechanical psychology that was almost an exact counterpart of that employed by contemporary behaviorists.

Although Samuel Butler's position as a novelist rests upon a single work, The Way of All Flesh, he must be given at least brief consideration. His is an anomalous position in the history of the English novel, for in some respects his novel is squarely in the stream of fiction of his times, and in others it is eccentric.

It is partially in conformity with the scientific thought of the times and partially not. Its main character, Ernest Pontifex, is based upon contemporary evolutionary theories in that he is at least fundamentally a product of his heredity and environment. But most of the theories based upon Darwin are completely materialistic, leave no room for any non-physical faculties, and therefore deny the possibility of such a thing as a free will. In this respect Butler is not in agreement with the prevalent trend

of scientific thought; he is an evolutionist, but he follows Lamarck rather than Darwin. Ernest Pontifex has an inherently weak character and is subjected to an unfavorable environment. Mechanistically viewed, he should meet failure. But, un-Darwin-like, he uses his will to improve his situation. It may seem fantastic to compare Ernest Pontifex with Oliver Twist, but there is a psychological similarity: both of them, without any mechanical stimulus to move them, are able to overcome or withstand their unfavorable environments. Neither Dickens nor Butler speaks of a free will, but each of them implies it. In Butler's case this was not in conformity with the trend of fictional psychology that has resulted in a J. D. Beresford.

It should be emphasized that with Samuel Butler, as with practically all of the other novelists discussed in this chapter, the consideration of the psychological effect of environment on character is not the principal purpose of the novel, but rather only a means either for expressing the author's philosophy or a means for achieving psychological realism. In The Way of All Flesh one of the principal purposes is the satirizing of institutions, particularly the Anglican Church. To this end Butler studies the effect that the Church Catechism has upon Ernest in his relations to his parents. Now this is a true psychological

study of an "environmental" factor, but it is not developed for its own sake. It is a means to an end. The opposite procedure is followed in the novels of J. D. Beresford.

CHAPTER VII

John Davys Beresford

In the previous chapter I pointed out that the treatment of environment had developed from the early romantic conception of it to the later scientific conception. This was not, of course, an even or a continuous development. Good novelists are too individualistic to be susceptible to graphing. Nor was it a development that was universal in its acceptance; the romanticism of Robert Louis Stevenson alone would belie that statement. But despite the irregularities of its course and the exceptions to it, there did occur a development within the novel of a scientific attitude toward environment as a psychological factor. That scientific attitude in its most characteristic contemporary form is behaviorism.

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"Behaviorism" is a relatively new term, but the kind of psychology which it describes is not wholly confined to the age of the term. Zola, the French naturalist, was certainly a behaviorist; less obviously so was Daudet. And in England, among others, Samuel Butler was most con-

45. Cf. John B. Watson: Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist (London, Lippincott, 1911).

spicuously a psychologist of behaviorist tendencies.

Yet it was not until more recent years, specifically the time of the War, that behaviorism in the novel became quite explicit, and, more importantly, became an end in itself rather than a means of expressing some other theme or underlying philosophy.

Illustrative of this type of novels are those of John Davys Beresford. Beresford's trilogy commonly called Jacob Stahl and consisting of The Early History of Jacob Stahl (1911), A Candidate for Truth (1912), and The Invisible Event (1915), is based in the first part upon the pathological case of a crippled boy and deals in the latter parts with the same individual who is then a more normal psychological subject. Throughout the three volumes Jacob Stahl's actions and development are portrayed from the mechanistic point of view of a behaviorist.

The very titles of the five books of The Early History of Jacob Stahl illustrate how the life of Jacob Stahl is treated scientifically, merely as a plastic subject susceptible to successive and classifiable influences: "Hester",

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46. I say that Butler exhibits only tendencies toward behaviorism rather than that he was a behaviorist, because his psychological beliefs, in their subordination to his interest in Darwinian theories, are only implicit in his work.

"Madeline", "Tony Farrell", "Owen Bradley", and "Lola". And in the first three chapters of Book One of this first volume of the trilogy there is a discussion of Jacob's ancestry in as far as it might affect him, of the incident in which Jacob as an infant received his permanent injury, of the retarding influence which the sympathy of his mother exerted on him, and of the beneficial influence of his Aunt Hester. All of this discussion is made with the care that an evolutionist might exert in investigating the heredity of a subject or a behaviorist in studying reactions to influences. The following passage, which treats of Jacob Stahl and his older brother Eric as well as their father Herman, is illustrative of the scientific tenor of the discussion:

The elder boy, Eric, neither then, nor at any later period of his life, gave trouble to anyone. A solid, serious person, Jacob's brother, with a genius for application. In him all the hereditary tendencies seemed to have blended and consolidated. In Herman Stahl they were all awash, bumping and tumbling; some two or three of the bigger always in evidence, the others, sometimes on top, at others forced below the surface; an untidy heterogeneous collection of qualities with nothing to bind them together

A strange convention of races and conflicting tendencies this that lies behind Jacob Stahl and his brother Eric, but the laws of heredity are hard to understand. That primary inclination to deviate from the original type upsets all calculations from the outset, since it is impossible to foretell what direction the variations will take, and all these variations are checked from spreading too rapidly by the human instinct that makes the small man marry

a woman six feet high. If like were attracted to like in the making of marriages, how much more quickly man's evolution would progress, and what queer types we should have in a few generations, even in such a small matter as that of nose, for instance. (47)

Another illustration of the mechanistic attitude manifested in Jacob Stahl is the portion of the narrative which tells of Jacob's accident and injury while an infant. It is the story of a mouse's intruding into a flour-tub so that the maid had to go to the grocer's for fresh flour and of a postman who caught the maid's eye so that she let the perambulator upset in which she had taken Jacob with her, and thereby injured Jacob. Now this basing of a story, a trilogy at that, on the peregrinations of a mouse, may be scientific, but if such a train of events is to be made a really scientific study, it would seem that it should be traced back to its sources, that the mouse should be made the subject of a scientific investigation, that his identity be established and his heredity and environment be studied. For if the life of the man is to be traced back to its causes and if its path crosses the path of the mouse, is it not logical that the mouse should be the sub-

47. John D. Beresford: The Early History of Jacob Stahl (New York, Doran, 1911), pp. 14-15.

48. Op. Cit., pp. 3-10.

ject of as careful investigation as the father of the man? Scientifically, yes; but artistically, no. It would seem, therefore, that even Beresford realizes that the scientific is not always compatible with the artistic and that some principle of selection, however abbreviated, is necessary if the work is to be kept from the completely ridiculous. The question, I believe, will ultimately be whether or not Beresford and his kind have not already gone too far and compromised their art by an excessive stress on the scientific.

As a further illustration of what effect this scientific treatment has on the novel there can be noted the contrast between the element of love in romantic novels and the corresponding element of sex in scientific novels. What constituted the "love interest" in non-scientific novels becomes, in the behaviorist novel, not something romantic, but rather an appetite, an impulse, a stimulus.

What examples I have been able to cite from Jacob Stahl to show the tenor of this type of novel, have been only a few of a potential many. The view point of the mechanistically minded scientist, of the behaviorist, is manifest throughout the three novels. ⁴⁹ Furthermore, Beresford has been

49. The following are additional passages in Beresford's trilogy that show his mechanistic attitude: The Early History of Jacob Stahl (New York, Doran, 1911), pp. 29, 43, 162, 233, 237, 393, 479; The Invisible Event (New

chosen merely as the most conspicuous example of a type of novelist that is rather common. Many modern novels exhibit characteristics very similar to his. Among them might be mentioned such novels as H. G. Wells' The New Machiavelli⁵⁰ and May Sinclair's Mary Olivier.⁵¹ These novels are decidedly not as behavioristic as Beresford's but they do manifest the same general attitude.⁵²

One conspicuous characteristic of this type of novel is that it tends almost inevitably to become biographic in form. While this tendency is, of course, to be neither praised nor condemned, yet it should be noted that it constitutes a complete inversion of the classical conception of plot—that in which the series of actions is unified not merely by a chronological sequence in the life of an individual character, but rather by the objective of ex-

York, Doran, 1912), pp. 32, 54, 156, 218, 259, 293, 404-5; and A Candidate for Truth (New York, Doran, 1915), pp. 36, 73, 79, 178, 324, 354, 360, 486.

50. Cf. H. G. Wells: The New Machiavelli (New York, Duffield, 1908). Passages displaying a mechanistic attitude may be found on pp. 20, 87, 105, 107, 109, 123, 197, 269, 378.
51. Cf. May Sinclair: Mary Olivier: A Life (New York, Macmillan, 1919). Passages displaying a mechanistic attitude may be found on pp. 82, 98, 108, 109, 113, 136, 227, 284, 288, 289, 293.
52. The analysis of Beresford's novels made in this chapter was designed to be merely an exposition of them. In Chapter VIII will be found further mention of them that will include more critical discussion of their worth.

pressing fictionally some underlying theme. The artistic inferiority of the pseudo-biographic form can be strikingly seen by comparing one of Beresford's novels with, for instance, one of Thomas Hardy's.

CHAPTER VIII

Fictional Value of the Factor of Environment

Although it is, of course, quite impossible to carry the analysis of any art to the point where the elements of greatness can be enumerated, yet it is one of the functions of criticism to observe the comparative worth of different combinations of the elements of the art and occasionally to transcend the comparative and arrive at a positive conclusion concerning the merits of a certain handling of a certain factor in the art. It is, I believe, critically sound to make explicit some of the comparisons that have been implicit in this thesis' consideration of various novels and in some cases to make positive statements about the worth of certain treatments of the factor of environment that have been observed.

In Chapter II there were indicated some possible classifications of novels based upon their varying uses of environment.⁵³ Some of the novels discussed thereafter fit the classifications only roughly. Furthermore, the classifications are not in all cases mutually exclusive. Yet by means of those divisions of the subject the worth of the various

53. Cf. above, p. 17.

treatments of the factor of environment can be considered.

Of the three kinds of novels of environmental theme it was pointed out that those whose main theme is merely a study of heredity and environment as antagonistic forces, are, because of the highly subjective character of the judgment exercised and its consequent unconvincing nature, generally inferior. This type of novel was considered separately in Chapter I; the other types have not been discussed individually.

The second type of novels of environmental theme consists of those whose main themes, although concerned fundamentally with environment, yet pertain also to a problem of society, of morals, vel ceterorum. I believe that of this type of novels it can be said that in as far as their worth is dependent on their themes, it increases in direct ratio with the degree in which the theme is concerned with something over and above a simple study of environment. The theme of George Gissing's The Nether World, for instance, is unimportant as a study of an environment if it is not understood that it is a study of more than that—of a social problem. And Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native would certainly be quite vapid if it was merely a study of Egdon heath as an environment and did not represent any more profound philosophy.

The third type of novels of environmental theme are those whose main themes are illustrations of a kind of psychology, such as behaviorism. Of this kind of novel Beresford's Jacob Stahl is, of course, the principal example that has been discussed. Transferable and applicable to this type of novel is a comment of Professor John T. Frederick. He recently said, in discussing new techniques in the novel:

Probably some of these will be as specious and meretricious as some of the highly touted new techniques of the past—inventions devised to hide the lack of real theme and real characters, of anything to say that is worth saying. (54)

Jacob Stahl is a complete embodiment of behaviorism so that this kind of psychology, which should provide a method, becomes instead an end in itself—a theme. And it is this perverted use of the method for the theme that devitalizes the trilogy. For any thoughtful reader cannot help asking himself what art there is in giving material form to a method. Any real art must be based on selection and discrimination. And what principle of selection can there be in using Jacob Stahl as the material form of this theme of behaviorism? It might have been any one of thousands of other characters with almost infinite vari-

54. John T. Frederick: "New Techniques in the Novel", English Journal (May, 1935), vol. xxiv, pp. 362-3

eties of forces affecting their lives. Why Jacob Stahl?

Professor Dahlstrom of the University of Michigan has recently pointed out that if we recognize five kinds of forces that may affect a character—physical, organic, social, egoic, and divine—then it can be proved algebraically that there are 52, 975 different situations possible.⁵⁵ If this is so I can see no reason why it would not be possible to have 52, 974 more Jacob Stahl's, each one of them as sterile of thought, as oblivious to the principle of selection in art, as the original one. This is the strongest indictment I can make against this type of novel—a type which is in a sense the perverted culmination of all the psychological progress of its predecessors.

In addition to these three kinds of novels of environmental theme there are those which were designated as psychological novels. It must be obvious that this classification represents, even less than the other three, a single type of novel. It is therefore a group that repulses attempts at unified criticism or evaluation.

In these psychological novels the factor of environment has taken its truer place, not as a theme, but merely as one of the elements that must be handled in the construc-

55. Carl E. W. L. Dahlstrom: "The Analysis of Literary Situation", PMLA (Sept., 1936), vol. LI, pp. 872-889 (particularly p. 883).

tion of characters. It is in that position that the factor of environment has been developed into an artistic tool. It has become an element which, when properly handled, enhances the psychological realism of the novel and, under the guidance of some novelists, such as Henry James or Thomas Hardy, provides new techniques of presentation.

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